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THE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT IN THE CHANGING SOCIAL SCENE.

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WITH INCREASED URBANIZATION AND THE ASSOCIATED EMPHASIS ON CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS, THE ONCE-UNCOMPLICATED JOB OF THE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT HAS BECOME AN INTRICATE TASK REQUIRING A TALENTED ADMINISTRATOR ASSISTED BY A STAFF SKILLED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF SPECIALTIES. THE ONCE-SIMPLE TASK OF ACQUIRING LAND ON WHICH TO CONSTRUCT NEW FACILITIES HAS NOW BECOME A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK IN MANY URBAN AREAS WHERE HUNDREDS OF RESIDENTS MAY HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH IN ORDER TO SECURE EVEN MINIMUM NECESSARY LAND. PROVIDED THE NECESSARY REAL ESTATE CAN BE SECURED (WHICH MAY TAKE YEARS), THE SUPERINTENDENT'S JOB HAS ONLY BEGUN. HE IS NOW FACED WITH THE BEWILDERING ARRAY OF ORGANIZATIONS, AGENCIES, AND COMMISSIONS (BOTH STATE AND LOCAL), WHICH CAN BECOME INVOLVED IN EVERY ASPECT OF THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF EVEN THE SMALLEST FACILITY. AT THIS STAGE, THERE CAN BE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR COMPETENT ADVISORY PERSONNEL ON THE SUPERINTENDENT'S STAFF. HE MUST BE MADE AWARE OF THE ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED--THEIR POWERS, PURPOSES, AND MODES OF OPERATION. LONG-RANGE PLANNING ON THE PART OF THE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT, BASED ON COMPETENT ADVICE, HAS PROVEN TO BE THE DECISIVE FACTOR IN ACHIEVING DESIRED OBJECTIVES, THEREBY CHANGING APPARENT ORGANIZATIONAL ROAD BLOCKS INTO VALUABLE EXPEDIENTS. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF COUNTY AND RURAL AREA SUPERINTENDENTS (15TH, LOUISVILLE, OCTOBER 9-12, 1960). (DA)

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SPEAKER: Dr. Shirley Cooper, Associate Executive Secretary, American Association of School Administrators, Washington, D. C.

TOPIC: The County Superintendent in the Changing Social Scene

PLACE: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Hotel

The Cultural Scene

Cultural change as we see it and know it now is dominated by population growth and movement, by the mechanization of agriculture, increasing size of farm units, and growing agricultural surpluses; by scientific development and technology, and the growing demands for occupational skills and technical information in employment; by the jockeying back and forth between giant labor organizations and tremendous industrial enterprises as each seeks a more favorable position on the economic scene; by the growth of governmental agencies and organizations at federal, state, and local levels; by the increasing concerns for the health and security and well being of people at all ages and in all walks of life; by millions of automotive vehicles moving rapidly along broad multi-laned highways leading into industrial centers from every direction; by an unprecedented system of communication--television and radio, telephone and telegraph, forums, institutes, workshops and conventions, book stores, paper-back counters, libraries and bookmobiles, newspapers, magazines, cartoons and funny papers; and by serious concern about safety on the highway, parking, sewage disposal, safe milk supply, water conservation, garbage disposal, air pollution, and delinquency. Suburbia with urban strips stretching out along the highways is undoubtedly the most pronounced feature of this entire industrial scene. We have recently been told that there are no less than 50 million people now living in suburban areas. Sociologists use such terms as "unstructured" and "scatteration" to describe this aspect of our cultural complex.

A Drama of Life

This phenomenon is far more than sociological structure. It is life in action, culture in the making; it is a multiplicity of relationships of people to each other; it is the moving, stirring, fermenting, striving, seeking, working of groups of people of all ages and from all walks of life. Their actions are characterized by all the nobleness, grandeur, and magnificence of the highest cultural aspirations together with the jealousies, pettiness, selfishness, and narrow prejudices that are a part of human nature. I like to think of this social scene as a drama that moves rapidly from one climax to another. It is a life that is crowded with color, character, competition, conflict, and accomplishments. It is a drama of children and youth, and of men and women--mechanics in greasy overalls, secretaries in crisp shirtwaist dresses, executives in grey flannels, office workers, laboratory technicians, social workers, policemen on the corner, bus drivers, pilots, filling-station attendants, physicians and nurses, and the long lines of factory workers moving toward billion-dollar industrial plants in the early hours of the morning. It is busy housewives, rosy-cheeked babies, and questioning teenagers, and thousands of school-age children. It is committees and commissions, agencies and organizations,

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and politics and government. The scene is characterized by housing developments, shopping centers, business offices, industrial plants, banking institutions, county courthouses, sanitary commissions, planning commissions, health departments, hospitals, and service agencies of fifty different kinds.

It seems fairly certain that the developments on the changing cultural scene which I have merely suggested rather than described are neither temporary nor trivial. They represent what might well be regarded as serious and conscious effort of 180 million people to adjust to conditions in an advanced industrial society--automation, giant industry, rapid travel and communication, high standards of living, advanced scientific information, and highly productive agricultural enterprise. The people of this country are becoming increasingly aware that agriculture cannot absorb more workers, that growth in the labor force and growth in population must be absorbed by manufacturing and by service activities. What we are witnessing and what each and every one of us is involved in is a mighty shifting all along the changing cultural front to cope with this situation. And as this movement takes place more and more people cluster around industrial centers and along arterial highways.

Community Action

Many of the problems and pressures that come to the county superintendent's office and with which he must deal directly or indirectly are but the natural consequences of this movement. The teen-age boy who has grown up in a rural community of West Virginia has known unbridled freedom. He had room to grow, to roam the woods with a rifle on his shoulder, to fish in the stream, and to yell to the top of his voice when he felt like it without annoying the neighbors or getting in anybody's hair. He had little worry about how other boys dressed. He knew no class system. His need for spending money scarcely went beyond the cost of a few shot-gun shells. But when he is suddenly placed down in a Cleveland suburb, conditions are different. He is fenced in. His behavior annoys the neighbors. His presence in the neighborhood or the school may be resented. He is frequently called a hillbilly in a manner that arouses resentment rather than pride. He resents community controls and has but little opportunity to release the tremendous energy that builds up in his youthful body. Consequently he becomes a behavior problem, and soon goes to the principal's office or, in unfortunate circumstances, to the juvenile court. The county superintendent and the people with whom he works have millions of boys and girls much like this transplanted West Virginia lad. The parents of these children have problems, too. The comforting feeling of familiar community life is gone. They don't know the people who live next door. They have no neighbors. They don't quite know how to behave or what is expected of them. They need more money than they ever needed before, and worry about what would happen in case of serious illness or unemployment. Producing a pass for the uniformed guard at the factory gate, punching the time clock, the demanding routine of the job, battling the morning and evening rush-hour traffic, joining a labor union, meeting the time payments on the washing machine and the car, and having money ready for the rent collector each month have disciplinary effects that they had not known as hill farmers or share croppers in the cotton belt.

The community must respond to these problems in totality. And as it does, serious attention is given to job opportunities, high productivity, more profits, greater valuation of taxable property, good family living conditions, more and better public services, provisions for open space and recreational facilities, school sites, school buildings, school teachers, school program, libraries, museums and theaters, parks and playgrounds, and health and safety. These and other purposes prominent in suburbia as well as in the more sparsely settled rural areas put a high priority on community organization, community planning, and cooperative community action. The county superintendent is not only a part of this whole complex process, but he

inevitably becomes one of the most important leaders in the whole movement.

In traditional American fashion, agencies, organizations, and institutions are being formed to cope with the problems in these new situations and in these new conditions in the same pragmatic manner that the nation earlier developed and made use of such agencies and institutions as home-steading, the one-teacher school district, the county superintendency itself, the agricultural experiment station, the agricultural extension service, the rural free delivery mail service, and the Rural Electrification Administration.

Multiplicity of Organizations

Some of the new agencies that have been created to deal with problems of a specific nature have broad jurisdiction and serve entire metropolitan areas. For example, there are the Transportation and Terminal Facilities Authority of New York, the Sewage and Water Supply Commission of Boston, the Airports and Aviation Authority of Detroit, the County Flood Control District of Los Angeles, the Omaha Power District in metropolitan Omaha, the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, the Meadowlands Regional Planning Board in New Jersey, the Middlesex Regional Planning Association in Connecticut, the Greater Portland Regional Planning Commission in Maine, and numerous soil conservation districts. Today there are something like 2700 soil conservation districts in the country concerned primarily with erosion control and soil and water conservation. Operating branches of these and other important agencies are frequently located in county seat towns. In a cursory check of general public information just a few days ago we discovered in a single county 40 different organizations and agencies of this kind with which the county superintendent found it expedient or necessary to work. It is not possible and neither would it be useful to run through this entire alphabet of agencies and organizations from the American Association for Retarded Children to the Zoological Gardens. But for the purpose of illustration, let us look briefly at a few illustrations. If the county superintendent is concerned with improving the program of health education he can count on having assistance, constructive criticism, bundles of materials that may or may not be useful, mandatory requirements, and a few roadblocks thrown in for good measure from the county health department, the county medical bureau, the county medical society, the county mental health association, the county sanitary commission, the county tuberculosis association, the county welfare association, the county heart association, the county medical center, the county dental society, the county septic tank inspecting service, the county nurses association, the county nutrition society, the agency for distributing surplus agricultural commodities, and the supervisor of school cafeterias.

The strength and youthful vigor of many of these organizations is overflowing and expensive. There are many instances in which hearty, effusive, and almost overwhelming invitations have been extended to county superintendents to make school facilities available, make school money available, and to make the time of school employees available for recreational purposes by such well meaning and very useful organizations and agencies as the county committee on physical fitness, the little league baseball association, the Isaak Walton League, the rod and gun club, the county and city park commission, the county recreation commission, the Audubon Society, and the wild life association.

Or if the county superintendent is constructing a new school plant the county planning commission insists on helping select the site, the county highway department assists him in planning exits and entrances, and the over-all building plans must meet requirements of the local building codes and state school building standards. As the building progresses, it must be inspected and approved by heating engineers, electrical engineers, fire underwriters, sanitary commission, and water control board.

And the on-the-job operations while the construction process is under way must conform with the general wage and employment regulations that are in effect in the area. A California school-building architect who has had a great deal of experience in planning and constructing school buildings reports that in some communities in this state a school-building plan has to meet the approval of as many as 140 different agencies.

Acquiring the School Site

Functions and processes that were relatively simple in sparsely settled rural areas become complex as the number of diverse interests and the number of operating agencies increase. The acquisition of a school site is a good illustration of this growing complexity of administrative functions. Many of you will recall experiences in acquiring a school site in a rural school district in which but two parties were involved--the school board and the property owner. The purchase price was negotiated, most often without court action, payment was made, the title transferred within a week or two, and that was all there was to it. But the process is much more complicated in suburban areas where land values may be as high as $200,000 an acre and where as many as 150 different individuals may be involved in the ownership of the property needed for a single school site. Mere enumeration of the major steps that are usually taken indicates that acquisition of a school site is by no means a simple procedure.

The census bureau and the county bureau of vital statistics supplies information that is essential in making population projections. The county zoning commisssion identifies areas that may be used for school sites and acquaints the superintendent with long-range plans for industrial development, housing projects, and shopping centers so that the school site will fit into an over-all county development in an orderly fashion. County and state road commissions supply information concerning the location of arterial highways and the branch roads that will need to be developed for exits and entrances to the school site. The chamber of commerce acquaints the superintendent with plans under way for new industrial developments and job opportunities that will attract additional families into the area. Real estate agencies assist by supplying estimates of land values. The county engineers locate such underground utilities as sewer lines, water supply lines, and power lines, not only for the purpose of essential service connections, but also to avoid constructing a school building over existing underground utilities. The department of interior supplies a topographical map which may include the location of dwelling units of various types, but also provides essential information concerning soil conditions and terrain. The assessors office acquaints the superintendent with the ownership of property that is under consideration and assessed valuations which may provide useful leads to negotiating purchase prices.

With information gathered from these and other sources the superintendent is ready to go before the board of education and ask for the adoption of a resolution authorizing his office to go ahead with the purchase of a school site. If purchase agreements can be worked out directly between the legal department of the school-board office and the individual property owners, the acquisition of the site moves along from this point in a regular fashion. But where so many are involved, there are always a few folks who insist on going through the courts. This exercise of the right of eminent domain by the school board then calls for the involvement of an additional agency--the local courts. All of this takes time. One superintendent recently reported that the time required in the acquisition of a single school site covered a span of three and a half years.

Charting a Course

How, then, does a county superintendent, or any other leader for that matter, take a bearing and chart a course in the midst of these numerous and diverse organizations? How does he avoid being tossed from pillar to post in the cross-currents of special interests? How does he go about using the tremendous potential that exists in these organized groups in moving forward the educational programs in his county? These are questions over which every county superintendent has pondered again and again. These are questions to which simple and direct answers are seldom found. But there are some useful guides to decision and action.

To begin with, organizations and agencies should be regarded as an essential part of democracy in action. Decentralized administration and delegation of responsibility and authority to local units of government call for agencies with administrative responsibility. When school districts are reorganized by direct legislative action there is no need for county reorganization committees. If school buildings were planned and constructed by the state or a national educational agency, as is the case in many countries of the world, there would be no need for local school-district building committees. If school budgets were planned, developed, and controlled by the state, the county and local superintendents would have no concern with assessors, treasurers, and county boards of supervisors. But such centralization of authority is intolerable to American people. They have insisted that such responsibilities be placed at county and local levels. And as these responsibilities are delegated by the state to units of government closest to the people, agencies and organizations have been created to perform the essential functions. These are the reasons for their existence.

Non-governmental organizations and agencies are the mechanisms of a free society in which issues are debated, ideas are tested, and action is initiated. The very diversity and multiplicity of organizations, the special interests espoused, and the varying purposes pursued are indications of cultural vitality. A culture in which ideas are not simmering on many fronts is a sterile culture. A society in which everybody is unquestioningly moving down the same road is not likely to be a free society. The county superintendent in a complex suburban society may be bewildered at times by the purr and brilliance of the complicated machinery of democracy. He may be disturbed by the pompous clattering of organizations and agencies. He may be blinded by the bright lights of suburban development. But only for a moment. As he turns to the underlying values of society, to the basic desires of individuals, whether they are functioning singly or in groups, he secures a sense of direction and a clarification of purposes that enables him to assume his position as an effective leader in this complex social scene.

American people are basically competitive. This has been a part of our tradition. They are not only competitive working as individuals, but they are competitive in groups. There is spirit and rivalry between organizations. And, while this may be troublesome at times to the county superintendent, it does, we believe, bring out the best that is in people and provides the stimulating spark for initiative that leads people on to accomplishments greater than even they themselves had anticipated.

A high premium has been placed on personal accomplishment in our society. Men and women in almost every locality are awarded status not on the basis of where they live or the position they happen to hold but on the basis of what they have actually accomplished. Once again, this individual cultural value has been transmitted to organized groups of people. Together they strive for recognition on the basis of what they are able to accomplish or to contribute to the on-going course of the culture.

There is a marked tendency for American people to sympathize with the underdog, with the person who is working on the short end of the stock, with the unfortunate and the under privileged. Many of the pressures that come to the county superintendent's office are oriented from this point of view. And, while he is unable to meet every request in a satisfactory manner, at least this cultural attitude among many organized groups enables him to recruit support for many types of educational activities.

Children and youth are held in high regard in our culture. Many organizations have been created and devote their efforts toward improving opportunities for the wholesome growth and development of young people. The ofttimes repeated phrase that "Children are the hope of the future" reflects this underlying cultural value, and this common concern enables the county superintendent to rally these forces to the support of education with little or no difficulty.

The belief that community life and the whole cultural complex of American society is moving forward to something bigger and better is deep-seated in the lives of most people. Nearly everybody believes that his community is a good community, but he likes to think that it is moving forward to something better, and that he, working as an individual or taking part in the various organizations to which he belongs, can contribute something worthwhile to this on-going developmental process.

People of this country from its very beginning have been deeply committed to the idea that the best solution to common problems can be found through reason, education, and general enlightenment. It is this belief that has motivated communities of people to push forward in developing an educational program from its meager beginnings in the early years of our history to the most broadly conceived and highly developed educational program that the world has known. And yet, with all of these accomplishments, we are not resting on our oars with an air of self-satisfaction. This motivating influence still exists and is ready in almost every neighborhood throughout the length and breadth of this country to be activated and directed towards further improvements in the educational program.

If there ever was a time when the county superintendent could be a lone wolf that time has passed. He cannot paddle his own canoe in the stream of life oblivious to all around him. If he would be an effective leader he must become as intimately acquainted with the organizations and agencies around him as the rural politician was in former years with the voters in his precinct. He must have the facts about these organizations. He must know their potentials. He must understand their purposes. He must be familiar with their methods of action. He must be a strategist who is able to call upon them and to direct their energies to the points where they can become effective. He cannot wait to be driven by pressure-group tactics. He must take the initiative and lead rather than be chased. This calls for long-range planning. It calls for leadership rather than control. It calls for diplomatic skill, patience, persistence, and vision. These qualities are the dimensions of successful administrative leadership at the county superintendency level.